Electronic, didactic and innovative platform for learning based on multimedia assets

D6.2 Report on the SWOT
Version 1.1
30 April 2023

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version*	**Publication date**	**Beneficiaries**	**Changes**
V1.0	30.04.2023	INN	▪ Initial version of Deliverable Owner
V1.1	30.04.2023	UJI	▪ Final version approved by Project Coordinator

1. Technical References

Project Number	101061424
Project Acronym	e-DIPLOMA
Project Title	Electronic, Didactic and Innovative Platform for Learning based On Multimedia Assets
Granting Authority	European Research Executive Agency (REA)
Call	HORIZON-CL2-2021-TRANSFORMATIONS-01
Topic	HORIZON-CL2-2021-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-05
Type of the Action	HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions
Duration	1 September 2022 – 31 August 2025 (36 months)
Entry into force of the Grant	1 September 2022
Project Coordinator	Inmaculada Remolar Quintana

Deliverable No.	D6.2 Report on the SWOT
Work Package	WP6: Policy recommendation
Task	T6.1.3: SWOT Analysis
Dissemination level*	PU - Public
Type of license:	CC-BY
Lead beneficiary	Innogrowth European Association for Innovation and Growth
PIC of the Lead beneficiary	INN:900529668
Contributing beneficiary/ies	All partners
PIC of the Contributing beneficiary/ies	- UJI: 999882985 - TLU: 999421653 - TU Delft: 999977366 - BME: 999904228 - UPV: 999864846 - CSI: 913552403 - ARIS FR: 911643734 - BRAINSTORM: 999441732
Due date of deliverable	30 April 2023
Actual submission date	30 April 2023

2. Table of Contents

3. Introduction

3.1. Executive Summary

As part of the work package 6, this report on the SWOT analysis is produced. The goal of this document is to analyse the SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the existing policies in the Digital Education field. To achieve this objective, the "Deliverable 6.1 Report of current policy situation and policy recommendation", which provides an overview of the e-learning ecosystem in each country involved in the e-DIPLOMA project, was highly beneficial. This report will provide a more detailed analysis than the D6.1.

The present report identifies the weakest points and address potential risks related to digital education that may arise from the SWOT analysis and is concentrated on several key areas.

3.2. Relation to Other Project Documents

The present document is related with the following documents:

- Deliverable 6.1 Report of current policy situation and policy recommendation
- Deliverable 6.3 Policy recommendation 2

3.3. Abbreviation List

The following acronyms are used in this document:

- DESI: Digital Economy and Society Index
- VET: Vocational Education and Training
- VHCN: High-Capacity Connectivity Network
- SWOT: Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats
- ICT: Information and Communication Technology
- AR: Augmented Reality
- VR: Virtual Reality

3.4. Reference Documents

Sources used for the present document:

- Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for the years 2021 and 2022.
- Deliverable 6.1 Report of current policy situation and policy recommendation

4. General Overview

Digital transformation has rapidly gained momentum worldwide, with countries and organizations actively taking steps to leverage technology to improve their competitiveness and growth prospects. In Europe, several countries have been making significant efforts to establish themselves as leading players in the digital economy. This has been facilitated by the European Union's efforts to create a single digital market and to promote the use of digital technologies across the region.

The integration of technology in education is a trend that has been rapidly gaining momentum in recent years, with many countries exploring the potential of digital education to improve the quality of learning and increase access to educational opportunities. These initiatives aim to equip teachers and students with the necessary digital skills and infrastructure to participate in online learning effectively, with the goal of promoting technology in education and improving the quality of online education.

In this context, it is essential to take a closer look at the progress made by various European countries in their journey toward digitalization. This analysis takes into account the recent data from the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for the years 2021 and 2022 and provides a comprehensive overview of the performance of Bulgaria, Hungary, Cyprus, Estonia, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy in terms of digitalization. The DESI index measures the progress of EU Member States toward a digital economy and society, taking into account several key areas such as digital public services, connectivity, human capital, and digital skills, among others.

These countries also make significant steps in the direction of digital education and Vocational Education and Training (VET). The national educational systems in these countries are actively incorporating digital education into their curricula to equip students with the skills they need to thrive in today's digital world. The main actors in digital education and VET play a crucial role in shaping the future of education and training and ensuring that citizens have access to high-quality educational opportunities that prepare them for the digital age.

However, the implementation of digital education is not without its challenges, including insufficient digital infrastructure, resistance to change, data privacy and security concerns, intellectual property rights, teacher training and development, and funding and resources. Addressing these challenges is critical to the success of digital education initiatives and ensuring that students have access to high-quality educational opportunities in the digital age. Based on the latest DESI data, we can see that each of these countries has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of digitalization.

Figure 1. Map of the participating countries

The analysis that follows provides a more in-depth look at the performance of each of these countries, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement. The analysis will help policymakers and stakeholders to understand the challenges faced by these countries and to identify opportunities for further improvement. The in-depth analysis of each country in the context of digital education and

vocational education and training (VET) is an important step in understanding the current state of affairs and determining what can be done to improve it.

The analysis will delve into the strengths and weaknesses of each country, taking into account factors such as digital infrastructure, resistance to change, data privacy and security, intellectual property rights, teacher training, and funding. This information will be useful for policymakers and stakeholders to understand the challenges faced by these countries in adopting digital education and to determine what steps can be taken to overcome these challenges. By identifying areas for improvement and taking action to address them, these countries can ensure that they provide their citizens with the best possible educational opportunities, preparing them for the digital age.

5. Participant's performance in global digitalization

In today's rapidly advancing digital world, the ability of a country to keep up with the latest advancements and integrate technology into various aspects of its economy and society has become increasingly crucial. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) provides an overview of the performance of countries in terms of digitalization. The seven countries - Bulgaria, Hungary, Cyprus, Estonia, Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy - that we will be focusing on in this analysis are diverse in terms of their digital landscape and have different strengths and weaknesses.

- Starting with Bulgaria, it ranks 26th out of the 27 European Union (EU) member states in the 2022 DESI. Despite this, the country has made significant progress in integrating digital technology into its economy and society, with a growing number of businesses taking advantage of e-commerce and cloud services. The government is also putting in place measures to enhance digital skills and improve access to digital public services.

- Hungary, on the other hand, ranks 22nd in the DESI, improving their performance slowly but gradually. The country excels in the areas of digital public services, human capital, and digital technology use. Hungary has a strong tradition of innovation and entrepreneurship, and the government is actively promoting the development of its digital ecosystem, including the use of e-commerce and digital technologies in various sectors.

- Cyprus, which ranks 20th in the DESI 2022, has made notable advancements in its digitalization journey. The country has a well-developed digital infrastructure, with high levels of access to broadband internet and mobile networks. Cyprus has also made substantial progress in digitalizing its public services, with the government implementing various measures to improve access to digital technologies and enhance digital skills.

- Estonia, with its score of 59.4 and a ranking of 7th in the DESI 2021, is considered one of the leaders in digitalization. The country boasts a high level of digital public services and human capital, but there is still room for improvement in terms of connectivity and the deployment of 5G. The country has high overall coverage of fixed Very High-Capacity Network (VHCN) connectivity, with the exception of rural areas where further investment is needed.

- Spain, which ranks 9th in the DESI 2021 with a score of 57.4, has made considerable progress in its digitalization journey, especially in the dimensions of digital public services and connectivity. The country has a well-developed digital infrastructure and is promoting the use of e-commerce and digital technologies in various sectors. The government is also implementing measures to enhance digital skills and improve access to digital public services.

- The Netherlands, which ranks 3rd in the DESI 2021 with a score of 67.4, is among the frontrunners in the EU in terms of digital skills of their human capital and also belongs to the most advanced in broadband connectivity, which has the potential of offering gigabit speeds. In addition, the Netherlands

has the highest scores for Digital public services in DESI. The 2022 DESI ranking of Member States shows that the Netherlands is placed in the range of the most advanced digital economies in the EU.

▪ Italy, with its score of 49.3 and a ranking of 18th in the DESI, is catching up in its digitalization journey. Despite this, the country has a strong industrial base and research communities in key areas such as Artificial Intelligence, High-Performance Computing, and Quantum. The government has established a Ministry responsible for digital affairs and has adopted several key strategies to drive its digital transformation forward. The country has a comprehensive National Strategy for Digital Skills, which is being implemented through an operational plan, and the Recovery and Resilience Plan provides the necessary funds to accelerate digital transformation.
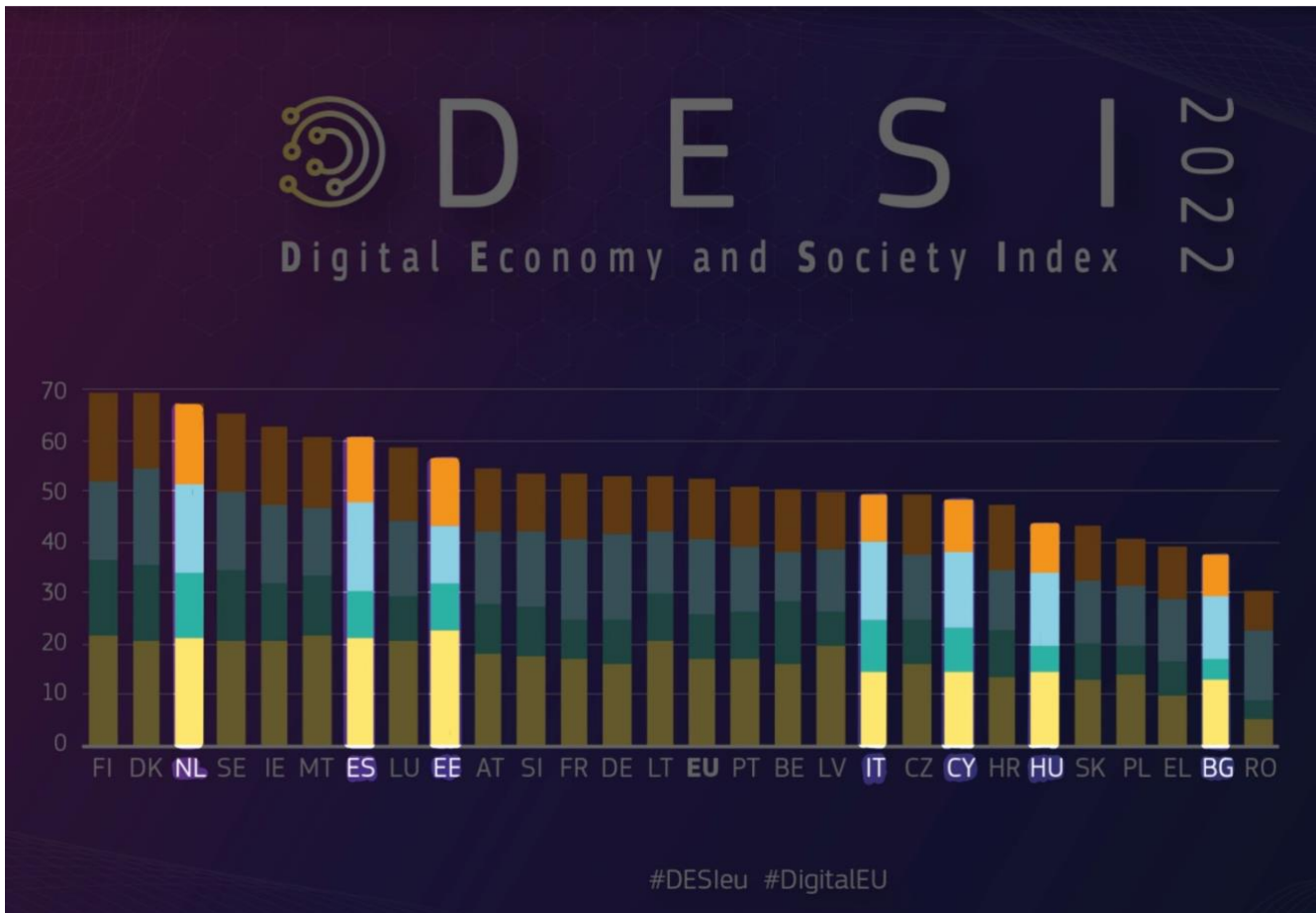
Figure 2. DESI 2022 rating of participating countries

Each of these countries has different strengths and weaknesses in terms of their digitalization journey, but they all have the potential to make further progress in this area. Whether it is through investment in digital infrastructure, promotion of digital skills, or the use of digital technologies in various sectors, these countries have the opportunity to drive their digital transformation forward and make the most of the many benefits that digitalization can bring.

6. Analysis of the situation on higher education institutions, schooling institutions, and VET providers: trends, similarities, and differences

In terms of higher education, there are some common trends among the participants. One trend is the increasing focus on internationalization and the promotion of international student exchange programs. This is aimed at providing students with a global perspective and intercultural skills, which are becoming increasingly important in today's interconnected world.

Another trend is the emphasis on technology and digitalization in education. All seven countries are investing in technology and digital infrastructure to enhance the learning experience and make it more accessible and convenient for students. This includes online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital educational resources.
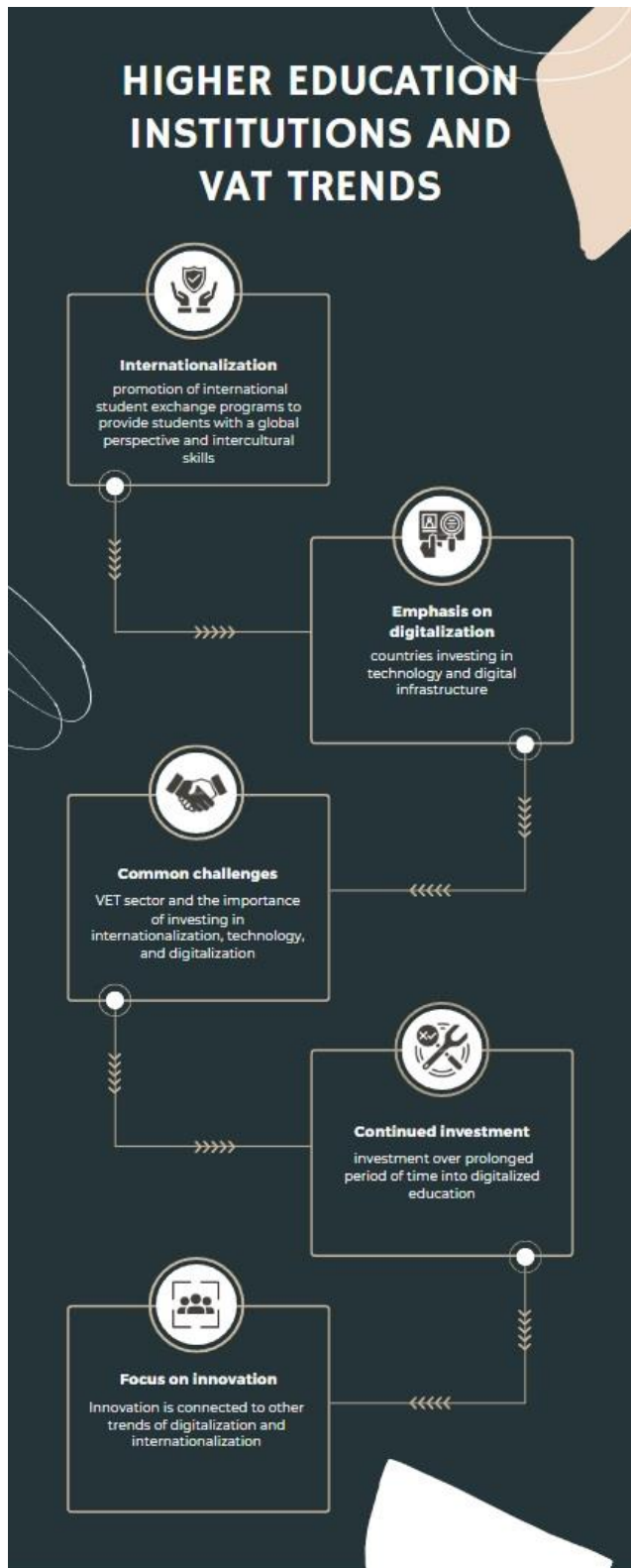
In terms of differences, the Netherlands has a highly developed higher education system and is known for its research-oriented universities. It also has a well-established system of vocational education and training (VET) providers. In contrast, Bulgaria and Hungary have a lower overall investment in higher education but are making efforts to improve their systems and attract international students. Bulgaria and Hungary both have VET systems combining school-based and work-based training. Bulgaria has basic, vocational, and higher VET programs, overseen by the National Agency for VET. Hungary offers vocational secondary education and vocational training, with the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry involved in developing relevant VET policies and programs.

Cyprus has a growing higher education sector, with a focus on areas such as tourism, business, and technology. However, its VET sector is not as well developed as in other countries. Spain has a long-standing tradition of higher education, with a strong focus on research and innovation. Italy has a well-established higher education system, with a strong emphasis on humanities and the arts, but its VET sector is facing challenges. Spain's vocational education and training (VET) system, Formación Profesional, provides flexible vocational programs at basic, intermediate, and higher levels with work-based learning as an integral part. The system is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, and INTEF develops and promotes VET policies and programs. The system is highly regarded for its emphasis on work-based learning and provides diverse vocational training options.

Estonia has several universities and private higher education institutions, with basic education being compulsory and upper secondary education offering academic and vocational programs. Estonia's VET system includes vocational schools and vocational higher education institutions, overseen by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The seven countries have different strengths and weaknesses in their higher education systems, but they share common trends and challenges. The focus on internationalization, technology, and digitalization is shaping the future of education in these countries, and their continued investment in these areas will be

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND VAT TRENDS

Internationalization
promotion of international student exchange programs to provide students with a global perspective and intercultural skills

Emphasis on digitalization
countries investing in technology and digital infrastructure

Common challenges
VET sector and the importance of investing in internationalization, technology, and digitalization

Continued investment
investment over prolonged period of time into digitalized education

Focus on innovation
Innovation is connected to other trends of digitalization and internationalization

Figure 3. Trends in e-learning in participating countries

crucial for their future success. Additionally, addressing the challenges faced by the VET sector will be important for ensuring that all students have access to quality vocational education and training opportunities.

7. Overview of main governmental initiatives and policies in the sphere of online education in the participant countries

The main governmental initiatives and policies in the sphere of online education showcase a range of efforts aimed at promoting and improving the quality of online education. All these countries have realized the importance of technology in education and have taken steps to leverage it for teaching and learning. While there are common features such as the emphasis on providing digital infrastructure and digital competence training to teachers, the differences in approach and the specific goals of each country highlight their unique educational systems and priorities.

For instance, Bulgaria has made digitalization in education one of its key priorities and has launched various initiatives such as the "Digitally Competent School" program to ensure that teachers and students are equipped with the necessary skills. In Estonia, the government has taken a comprehensive approach to technology in education through its ambitious Tiger Leap program and the Digital Accelerator, a digital competence development program aimed at the entire school teaching staff.

On the other hand, in the Netherlands, the government has launched the "Digital Learning Environment" initiative that seeks to create a national digital learning environment and improve the quality of online education. Italy has also introduced a "Digital School" program that aims to increase the use of technology in education and improve the digital skills of students and teachers.

In Hungary, the government has launched various initiatives such as the "E-School" program that seeks to promote the development and use of digital technologies in education, as well as the "IT for Children" program that aims to promote digital literacy among children. In Cyprus, the government has established the "Cyprus Institute of Technology" to promote the development and application of technology in education and research.

Finally, in Spain, the government has launched various initiatives such as the "Digital Competence Plan for Schools" and the "e-Twinning" program that aim to promote the use of technology in education and improve the digital skills of teachers and students.

There is a range of main common features in the government initiatives and policies in the sphere of online education among the participants. There are the following:

Figure 4. Common features of government actions in education digitalization

- Emphasis on digital infrastructure and technology: All seven countries have recognized the importance of having a robust digital infrastructure and technology to support online education. They have implemented initiatives to improve the availability of technology in schools and institutions of higher education to support online learning. Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Spain have invested in improving their digital infrastructure, including providing students and teachers with access to technology and digital tools. Similarly, Estonia has integrated digital education into the national curricula, recognizing it as a key component of general education. In Cyprus, the government and the European Social Fund have co-founded a project to create tailored digital educational content for secondary education. This demonstrates the commitment of these countries to the use of technology as an essential tool in supporting and enhancing the learning process.

- In Spain, in particular, the emphasis on technology is evident in the trend toward immersive experiences and gamification in online learning. The use of augmented reality and artificial intelligence are also being explored, indicating a forward-thinking and innovative approach to using technology in education. In the Netherlands, the fast and reliable internet has facilitated the implementation of online learning. All schools are equipped with digital boards and tablets, and universities have excellent technological infrastructure, making online learning a feasible and effective option. In Cyprus, the digital educational content will be available on the Ministry's Learning Management System, demonstrating the emphasis on technology as a central component of online learning. These countries have demonstrated their recognition of the importance of technology in supporting online learning and have taken steps to improve and integrate technology into their educational systems.

- Support for teachers and staff in adopting the technology: Most of these countries have implemented programs to provide training and support to teachers and staff in the effective use of technology in online education. This has been done through various initiatives, such as providing training and support programs, to ensure that teachers and staff are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively use technology in online education. This has been crucial in ensuring the success and sustainability of online education in these countries, as teachers and staff play a crucial role in facilitating and delivering online learning to students. By providing support and resources to teachers and staff, educational institutions can ensure that online education is delivered effectively and that students receive a quality education. This also helps to ensure that online education remains a viable option for students and that it continues to grow and evolve as technology improves.

- Focus on quality and relevance of online education: The countries have introduced policies and initiatives aimed at ensuring that online education programs are of high quality and relevant to the needs of students and the labour market. This focus on technology helps to ensure that students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the future and for the demands of the labour market. Similarly, in Cyprus, there have been initiatives aimed at creating tailored digital educational content for secondary education to ensure that students receive a relevant and high-quality education. This focus on quality and relevance of online education is a key aspect of the efforts made by these countries to promote the effective use of technology in education.

- Collaboration between government, schools and universities, and the private sector: Several of these countries have established partnerships between government agencies, schools and universities, and the private sector to promote the development and implementation of online education initiatives. These partnerships are aimed at pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise to create quality online education programs that meet the needs of students, the labour market, and society as a whole. Through these collaborations, government agencies provide funding and support, while schools and universities offer expertise in education and curriculum design. Private sector companies bring in their technology and expertise in digital platforms to enhance the online learning experience. These collaborations help to ensure that online education initiatives are well-rounded, relevant, and of high quality.

There are also striking differences among these seven countries in the sphere of online education:
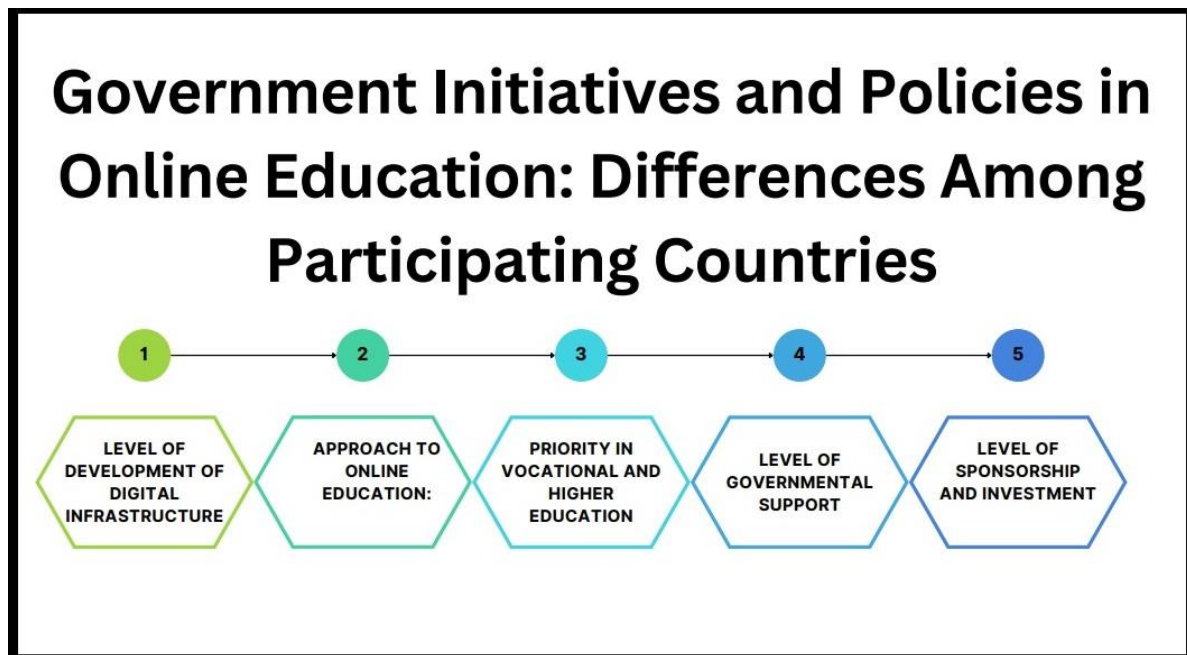
Figure 5. Differences in government actions in education digitalization

- Level of development of digital infrastructure: Some countries like Estonia and the Netherlands have a more advanced digital infrastructure than others like Bulgaria and Cyprus, which have been slower to adopt technology in education, while others have equipped all schools with digital boards and tablets, and universities have an excellent technological infrastructure, making online learning a feasible option. On the other hand, countries like Bulgaria and Cyprus have been slower to adopt technology in education and are still in the process of developing their digital infrastructure. Despite the differences in the level of development, all of these countries have recognized the importance of digital infrastructure and technology in supporting online education and are making efforts to improve and expand it.

- Approach to online education: Some countries like Spain and Italy have been slower in adopting and incorporating online education into their curricula and teaching methods. However, in recent years, these countries have started to invest more in technology and digital infrastructure to support online learning. On the other hand, countries like Estonia and the Netherlands have taken a more proactive approach, investing in technology and digital infrastructure, and incorporating online education into their education systems in a more comprehensive manner. These countries have placed emphasis on digital competence as an important general competence for students to acquire during their education and have implemented policies and initiatives to support the development and implementation of online education. This difference in approach to online education is likely a reflection of the varying levels of development of digital infrastructure and technology in each country.

- Priority is given to vocational and higher education: Some countries like Hungary and the Netherlands have given priority to vocational education in the development of online education, while others like Italy and Spain have given priority to higher education. In Hungary and the Netherlands, there is a greater emphasis on vocational education, as they believe that it will play a significant role in preparing students for the workforce and addressing the skills gap in the job market. On the other hand, countries like Italy and Spain have given priority to higher education, as they believe that this is essential for the development of a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. These priorities reflect the specific needs and challenges faced by each country and the ways in which they believe online education can best support their goals and objectives. It is important to note that, regardless of the priority given to vocational or higher education, all of these countries recognize the value of online education in promoting access to quality education for all students.

- Governmental support: The level of government support for online education initiatives varies among these countries, with some providing more funding and resources than others. The level of government backing for online education initiatives varies across Estonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Hungary. Estonia, the Netherlands, and Spain provide strong investment in online education initiatives, with significant investments in digital learning resources and platforms. Bulgaria and Hungary have relatively low levels of government funding, with limited resources and financing for online education initiatives. Italy and Cyprus fall in the middle, with some progress in developing online learning resources and platforms but limited government sponsorship. Many countries have made efforts to develop online learning resources and platforms in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, all seven countries have recognized the importance of online education and have made efforts to support it in various ways.

The main governmental initiatives and policies in the sphere of online education among these seven countries aim to ensure that teachers and students have the necessary digital skills and infrastructure to participate in online learning effectively. These initiatives range from providing training and support for teachers to investing in the development of digital infrastructure. The aim is to improve the quality of online learning and ensure that it is accessible to everyone.

Despite the similarities, each country has its own approach to online education, which is influenced by factors such as the level of government support, the priorities given to different areas of education, and the existing digital infrastructure. While there are differences in approach and specific goals, the common aim of promoting technology in education and improving the quality of online learning remains a consistent feature among all these countries.

8. The level to which digital education is integrated and conceptualized in the curricula of the national educational system of the participating countries

Digital education is integrated and conceptualized in the curricula of the national educational systems in Bulgaria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Estonia, Cyprus, Spain, and Italy.

- In Bulgaria, digital competence is included in the national curricula and e-learning methods are being used in the education process. In Hungary, the national curricula include a focus on digital competence and the development of digital literacy. The Dutch education system also has a focus on digitalization and the implementation of e-learning methods in the education process.

- In Estonia, digital education is fully integrated and conceptualized in the curricula, with the majority of educational institutions using e-learning solutions for teaching and learning, and for managing and monitoring. Cyprus has initiated an effort to create tailored digital educational content for secondary education and has a Learning Management System in place.

- In Spain, digital competence is recognized as a key competence within the curriculum and is included in the recent Organic Law on Education approved in 2020 (LOMLOE). The majority of regular classrooms have an internet connection and 60.1% of classrooms have Interactive Digital Systems. Spanish universities also have institutional e-Learning platforms and the majority use Moodle as their LMS.

- In Italy, digital education is integrated and conceptualized in the curricula but only a part of educational institutions employs e-learning solutions for teaching and learning, and for managing and monitoring.

Overall, it is evident that the national educational systems in these countries are actively incorporating digital education into their curricula to equip students with the skills they need to thrive in today's digital world. The governments of these seven countries recognize the importance of digital education and are making efforts to integrate it into the education system. They understand that the digital world has a

significant impact on the way we live and work, and they want their citizens to be equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in this environment. By incorporating digital education into their curricula, they aim to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for the future.

The various online learning forms being offered, such as asynchronous self-study, blended learning, and learning in simulators, cater to the diverse needs and preferences of students and help them to learn in a way that suits them best. In addition, the countries are investing in digital infrastructure, providing support to teachers and staff, and collaborating with various stakeholders to achieve their goals in this field. The priority is given to vocational and higher education, as well as the level of government support, also vary between countries, but the overarching goal of promoting digital education remains the same.

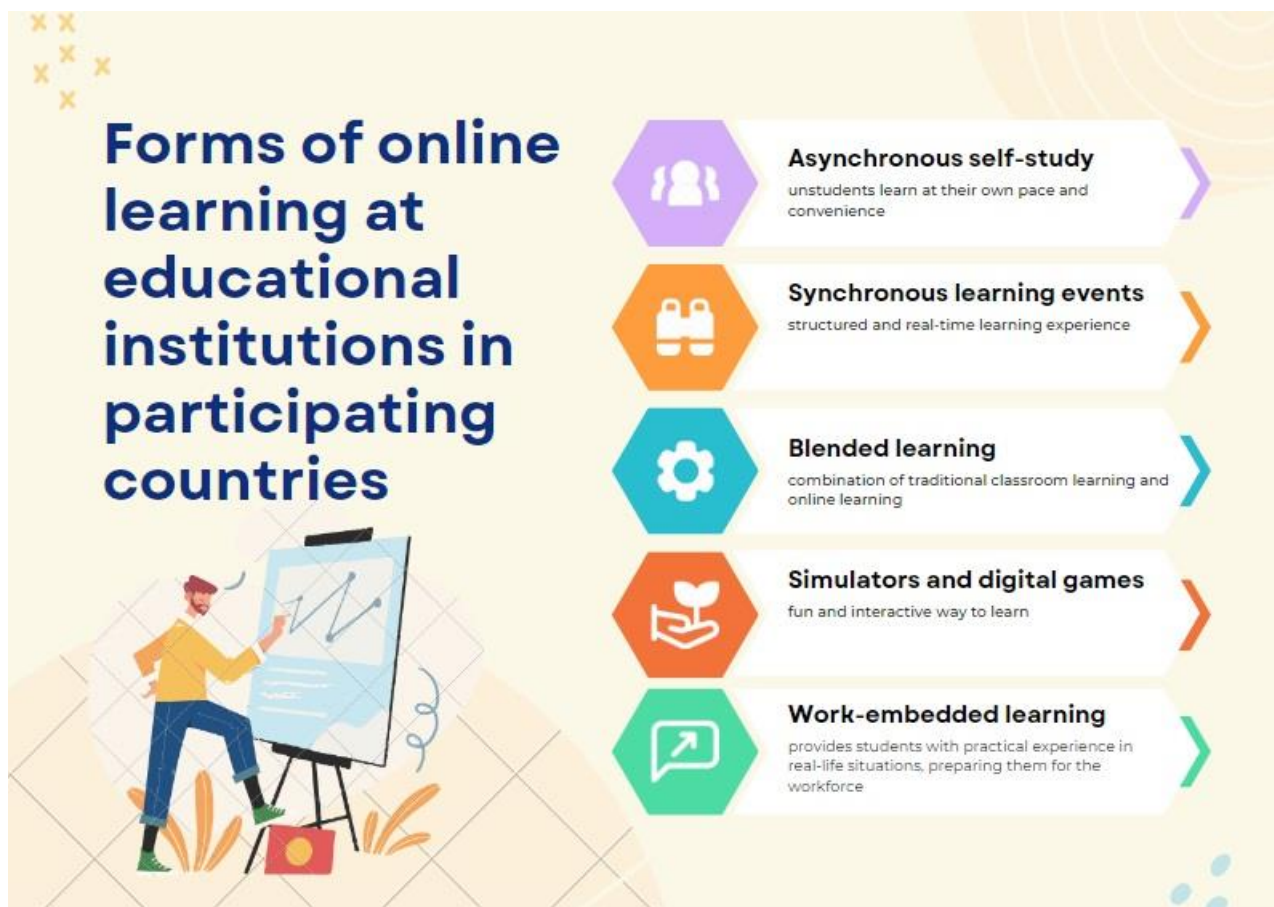## 9. Forms of online learning at educational institutions in participating countries

Figure 6. List of practical forms of online learning

When it comes to online learning, educational institutions in different countries have taken different approaches. Some countries, such as Bulgaria and Estonia, have implemented a comprehensive approach to online learning by creating a single sign-on platform with high levels of data security and integrating multiple educational applications into one system. On the other hand, Italy has only partially integrated e-learning solutions into the curricula and the majority of institutions do not use e-learning solutions.

In Spain, immersive experiences and gamification are popular forms of online learning and institutions are experimenting with new technologies such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence. The Netherlands, with its fast and reliable internet, has equipped all schools with digital boards and tablets, and universities have excellent technological infrastructure, making online learning a feasible option. Cyprus has also taken steps to enhance the learning process by creating tailored digital educational

content for secondary education. The focus in these countries is to provide a diverse and innovative approach to online learning that engages students and helps to make learning more effective.

In terms of the variety of online learning forms, all the countries have a similar approach, with options for asynchronous self-study, synchronous learning events, blended learning, hybrid/flexible learning, learning in simulators, digital games, and work-embedded learning. The variety of online learning forms available in these countries includes asynchronous self-study, which allows students to learn at their own pace and convenience. Synchronous learning events, on the other hand, provide a more structured and real-time learning experience.

Blended learning is a combination of traditional classroom learning and online learning and provides a flexible approach to education. Hybrid/flexible learning is similar to blended learning, with a focus on offering greater flexibility in terms of the time and place of learning.

Learning in simulators and digital games offers students a fun and interactive way to learn, while work-embedded learning provides students with practical experience in real-life situations. This helps students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations and prepares them for the workforce.

The information provided suggests that the countries have a well-rounded approach to online learning, offering a variety of options to meet the diverse needs and preferences of students and teachers.

Overall, while each country has its own approach to online learning, they all aim to integrate technology into the learning process and offer a variety of online learning options to students. By doing so, they aim to provide students with access to a variety of online learning options, including virtual classrooms, e-learning courses, and digital textbooks, among others.

This approach to digital education is designed to enhance the learning experience and to make education more accessible, flexible, and convenient. The aforementioned examples demonstrate the various approaches that countries are taking to digital education and the efforts they are making to integrate technology into the learning process. By doing so, they aim to provide students with high-quality educational opportunities and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the digital age.

10. A broad overview of universities and VET institutes affected by the COVID-19 economic downturn and government initiatives to support educational institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn have had a significant impact on universities and VET institutes across different countries, including Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain, Estonia, and Italy. Governments in these countries have launched various initiatives to support educational institutions and help them to adopt new technologies, including investment in digital infrastructures, training programs for students and teachers, and grants for students. The aim of these initiatives is to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic and promote the growth of the digital economy.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies from country to country and more research is needed to determine their impact. Nevertheless, it is clear that the use of digital technologies will play a crucial role in the future development of educational institutions and the wider economy.

- In Bulgaria, the government has taken steps to increase the digitalization of the education sector in response to the economic downturn and COVID-19 pandemic. This includes investment in digital infrastructure and training programs for teachers to improve their digital competencies.

- In Cyprus, the government has implemented a number of initiatives to support the education sector, including the development of a national e-learning platform and investment in technology to improve online learning experiences. The government has also increased funding for scholarships and study grants.

- In Hungary, the government has invested in the development of digital infrastructure and technology to support the education sector. This includes the creation of a national e-learning platform and the training of teachers to improve their digital competencies.

- In the Netherlands, the government has taken steps to support the education sector in response to the economic downturn and COVID-19 pandemic. This includes investment in digital infrastructure, technology, and training programs for teachers to improve their digital competencies.

- In Spain, the government has included digitalization as a key component of its Recovery and Resilience Plan. This includes the promotion of digital tools for SMEs, digital training for society as a whole, and the promotion of innovative projects. The budget for scholarships and study grants has also been increased to support students affected by the economic downturn and pandemic.

- In Estonia, the government has a national Estonian Digital Society Development Plan 2030 in place to increase the digitalization of the education sector. Research has shown the need for investment in infrastructure and educational technologists as mentors to support the implementation of e-learning in universities.

- In Italy, there is increasing strategic planning to make e-learning a more prevalent form of learning at universities. The government is focused on improving the digital competencies of teachers and the development of digital infrastructure to support the education sector.

Universities and VET institutes have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. Governments in the analysed countries have taken various initiatives to support educational institutions in this difficult time. These initiatives include an increasing budget for scholarships and study grants, promoting the use of digital technologies, and investing in the development of digital infrastructures. Additionally, there is a growing focus on e-learning and online education, as well as the need for teachers and staff to develop their digital competencies.

11.Dynamics of learners' demographics, eg. age, gender, and social background in participating countries

Age, gender, and social background are some of the key factors influencing the dynamics of learners' demographics. In Italy, data from Eurostat shows that the country consistently ranks below the EU average in terms of digital skills and internet access. This highlights the need for digital literacy initiatives aimed at the population, especially among older individuals who may struggle with digital technology.

- In Bulgaria, the percentage of individuals with tertiary education has increased significantly in recent years, with the majority of these individuals located in the capital city, Sofia. Additionally, the enrolment rate in early childhood education is high, and the gender balance in secondary education is fairly equal.

- In Spain, the number of students enrolled in non-university education has increased, with a high proportion of foreign students from Europe and Africa. In the area of university education, the enrolment rate of women is slightly higher than that of men. Online learning has been shown to be effective in the country, with students retaining more material when learning online compared to traditional classroom settings.

- In Estonia, the number of individuals with higher education has increased by 2.2%, with the majority located in Harju County, surrounding the capital city of Tallinn. Enrolment in general education has increased slowly over the past 10 years, while enrolment in higher education has decreased slightly. The gender balance among learners has remained relatively stable.

- In Hungary, the proportion of individuals with tertiary education has increased steadily in recent years, with the majority of these individuals located in the capital city, Budapest. Additionally, enrolment in early childhood education is high, and the gender balance in secondary education is fairly equal.

- In Cyprus, the dynamics of learners' demographics, such as age, gender, and social background, vary depending on the level of education. However, in general, the student population is relatively diverse, with a mix of local and international students from different age groups and social backgrounds. In higher education, there is a relatively high proportion of female students, particularly in fields such as health and education. The number of mature students is also increasing, as more adults return to education to improve their skills and career prospects. In vocational education and training (VET), there is a significant emphasis on developing skills for the local workforce, particularly in sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

- In the Netherlands, the dynamics of learners' demographics, such as age, gender, and social background, also vary depending on the level of education. Generally, the student population is diverse, with a mix of local and international students from different backgrounds. In higher education, there is a relatively high proportion of female students, particularly in fields such as healthcare, education, and social sciences. Additionally, the number of mature students is increasing, as more adults return to education for personal or professional development. In vocational education and training (VET), there is a strong emphasis on developing practical skills for the local workforce, particularly in areas such as engineering, technology, and agriculture. The VET system also provides opportunities for students to gain work experience through apprenticeships and internships.

The dynamics of learners' demographics vary greatly between Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Estonia, Cyrus, the Netherlands, and Hungary. Factors such as the proportion of individuals with higher education, enrolment rates, and digital literacy levels all play a role in shaping the demographic makeup of learners in these countries. Despite these differences, it is clear that there is a continued need for digital literacy initiatives and efforts to increase enrolment in higher education, especially among women and marginalized populations. While Italy has consistently ranked below the EU average in digital skills, the other countries have seen an increase in the percentage of adults with higher education and a growth in the number of foreign students enrolled in education.
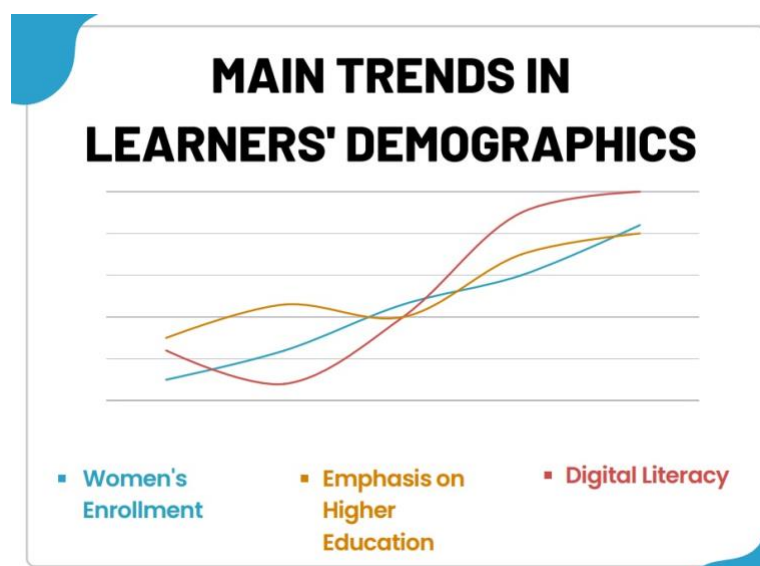

Figure 7. Trends common for participating countries

12. Analysis of the level of the availability of online education for all learners

The availability of online education technology for all students, including those who are immigrants, foreigners, ethnic and other minorities, varies greatly across different countries.

In Hungary, online education technology is primarily available for students in elite schools, such as English or German minority schools. However, refugees are not accommodated by the educational system and have to rely on personal mobile phones and online translation services to access education.

In the Netherlands, all students have equal access to online education technology. The government provides laptops or computers to primary and secondary students whose families cannot afford them, and all children below the age of 18 are treated equally, regardless of their parent's immigration status.

In Spain, while progress has been made in digitization, significant gaps still remain. A significant proportion of the elderly population and households without computers do not have access to the internet. The business sector in Spain is also lacking in advanced digital technologies, with a low percentage of companies using social media for business purposes and even fewer utilizing tools for sharing information and advanced technologies like big data or artificial intelligence. Additionally, there is a significant gender gap in digital skills and professions, with only 10% of STEM workers in Spain working in digital sectors, and a proportionately low number of women working in these fields.

In Estonia, public initiatives have provided computers for Ukrainian migrants, but it is unclear what access to online education technology is like for other immigrants, foreigners, ethnic, and other minority groups.

Italy has been improving the availability of online education for all learners, but some still face challenges related to digital access and quality. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the development and adoption of online learning. However, there are concerns about the need to ensure learners receive adequate support and interaction, particularly in rural areas with limited internet coverage. Despite these challenges, Italy has made progress in expanding online learning opportunities, particularly in higher education. The government has provided funding and resources to support the development of online learning platforms and tools.

Online education availability in Cyprus has been improving, with the government providing funding and resources to support its development, particularly in higher education. However, access and quality issues remain, particularly in rural and remote areas. Despite these challenges, Cyprus has made progress in expanding online learning opportunities.

In Bulgaria, online education availability for all learners has been improving, but challenges remain. The government has made efforts to expand access to digital resources and connectivity, particularly in higher education. However, access and quality issues persist, particularly in rural areas. Despite these challenges, Bulgaria has made progress in developing online learning platforms and tools, with the government providing funding and resources. Overall, online education availability in Bulgaria is gradually improving.

While some countries like the Netherlands have made great strides in ensuring equal access to online education technology for all students, there are still significant disparities in access, particularly for immigrants, foreigners, ethnic and other minority groups, and in the elderly population in countries like Spain.

13. Target Audience Analysis

13.1. Main Actors Overview

In general, the main actors in digital education and VET in these countries are typically government departments responsible for the development and implementation of education and training policies. There are also organizations responsible for promoting the use of digital technologies in education and training, and for providing support for the development of education and training in the country.

In Estonia, for instance, the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for overseeing education and training and has taken a proactive approach to integrate digital education into the country's curricula. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, there are organizations, such as Nuffic, responsible for promoting international cooperation in higher education and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise between institutions in the Netherlands and those in other countries. This approach highlights the importance placed on international collaboration and the sharing of best practices in online education. The focus on collaboration and information-sharing highlights the need for continued improvement and adaptation in the rapidly evolving field of online education.

Overall, the main actors in digital education and VET in these countries play a crucial role in shaping the future of education and training, and in ensuring that citizens have access to high-quality educational opportunities that prepare them for the digital age. These actors include government agencies, educational institutions, and private-sector organizations.

For example, in Estonia, there is a specific authority responsible for overseeing the implementation of policies related to education and training. This authority works to promote the use of technology in education and to improve the quality of online learning. In the Netherlands, there are organizations responsible for promoting international cooperation in higher education, and in Italy, there are initiatives aimed at ensuring that online education programs are of high quality and relevance to the needs of students and the labour market.

All these actors work together to ensure that citizens have access to the digital skills and infrastructure they need to participate in online learning effectively. Ultimately, the goal of these initiatives is to promote technology in education and to provide citizens with access to high-quality educational opportunities that will prepare them for the digital age.

13.2. Regulatory, Legal Framework General Analysis

▪ Bulgaria, Hungary and Estonia:
These countries have a legal framework that includes regulations related to personal data protection and cyber security, but information about specific laws and regulations for digital education and copyright is limited. However, the specific laws and regulations regarding digital education and copyright in these countries are not well documented and may need further development. It is important for these countries to have clear laws and regulations in place to ensure the security and protection of sensitive information and data related to online education. Additionally, well-defined copyright laws are necessary to ensure that online educational materials are used legally and ethically. The lack of information on these laws and regulations may limit the development and growth of digital education in these countries.

▪ The Netherlands:
The Netherlands has a legal framework that includes data protection and privacy regulations, but the specific laws and regulations related to digital education and copyright have not been provided.

▪ Spain:

Spain has a well-defined legal framework that includes data protection and privacy regulations, as well as specific policies and strategies related to digital education, such as the E-learning White Paper and the Framework of Reference for Digital Competence in Teaching.

- Italy:

Italy also has a comprehensive legal framework, which includes regulations related to data protection, privacy, and cyber security, as well as a national strategy for digital skills and a specific document for the design of training activities in digital education.

- Cyprus:

In Cyprus, information about the legal framework related to education, digital education, personal data protection, and copyright is limited.

Spain and Italy have a well-defined legal framework in place for digital education, personal data protection, and copyright, while the other countries have some regulations in place but the information available is limited.

It can be concluded that countries have different approaches to the legal framework of education, digital education, personal data protection, and copyright. Some countries, like the Netherlands and Italy, have laws specific to digital education, while others, like Bulgaria, Hungary, and Estonia, have laws that address cyber security and data protection but not necessarily digital education. Additionally, some countries, like Spain, have specific laws and policies for the protection of personal data in education, while others, like Cyprus, do not seem to have a clear legal framework for the same.

In terms of copyright, countries such as Italy and Spain have a Copyright Law, which applies to all fields, while other countries, like Bulgaria, Hungary, and Estonia, have a copyright act but it does not necessarily address the issue of digital education.

Overall, each country has its unique approach to the legal and regulatory framework for education, digital education, personal data protection, and copyright, and it is important to consider these when implementing digital education initiatives within the country. These frameworks vary from country to country and play a crucial role in shaping the future of digital education. Understanding and adhering to these regulations is crucial in ensuring the success and sustainability of digital education initiatives.

13.3. Vocational Education and Training General Analysis

Vocational education plays a crucial role in the development of various countries in Europe. In Italy, vocational education is seen as an alternative to traditional academic education and is widely recognized as a valid path for students to gain practical skills and knowledge in a specific trade. Here is the share of individuals who have at least basic digital skills in the EU countries, according to the EU survey on the use of ICT in Households and by individuals.
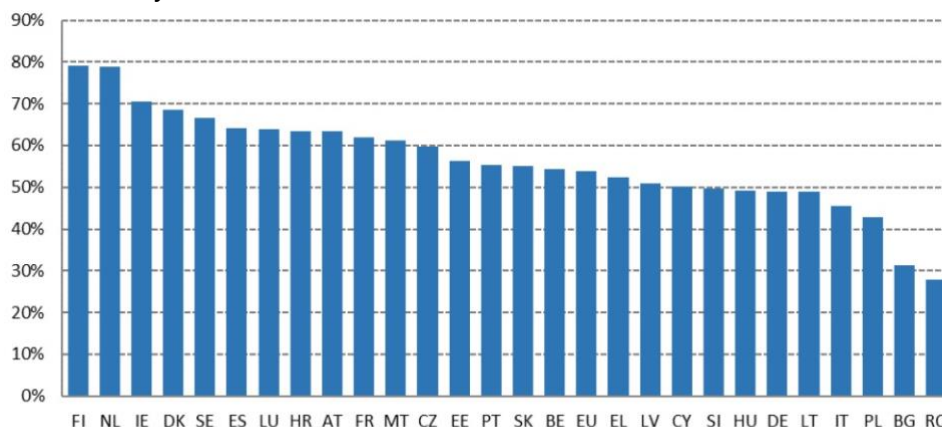
Source: Eurostat, European Union survey on the use of ICT in Households and by Individuals

Figure 8. Percentage of population in EU countries with digital skills

The Italian government provides funding for vocational schools and offers apprenticeships in a variety of fields to encourage students to pursue vocational careers.

In Spain, vocational education is known as "Formación Profesional" and is widely recognized as a valuable path to employment. Spanish vocational schools offer training in a range of industries, including construction, hospitality, and healthcare, among others. These programs are designed to provide students with hands-on experience and help them to develop the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.

In Bulgaria, vocational education is seen as a key component of the country's economic development strategy. The government provides funding for vocational schools and offers students the opportunity to participate in apprenticeships and internships in a variety of industries. The goal of these programs is to prepare students for the workforce and provide them with the skills necessary to succeed in the modern job market.

Estonia places a strong emphasis on vocational education and offers a wide range of programs in fields such as construction, manufacturing, and technology. These programs provide students with hands-on experience and the opportunity to work with experienced professionals in their field. The Estonian government provides funding for vocational schools and encourages students to participate in apprenticeships and internships to gain practical experience and build their professional network.

In Hungary, vocational education is seen as a viable alternative to traditional academic education. Hungarian vocational schools offer programs in a range of industries, including manufacturing, technology, and hospitality, among others. These programs provide students with hands-on experience and the opportunity to work with experienced professionals in their field. The Hungarian government provides funding for vocational schools and encourages students to participate in apprenticeships and internships to gain practical experience and build their professional network.

In Cyprus, vocational education is considered to be an important component of the country's economic development strategy. The government provides funding for vocational schools and offers students the opportunity to participate in apprenticeships and internships in a variety of industries. These programs provide students with hands-on experience and help them to develop their skills.

Vocational education plays a crucial role in the development of the workforce in analyzed countries. Each country has its own unique approach to vocational education, with different levels of emphasis placed on theoretical and practical learning, as well as different types of vocational schools and programs. This means that the structure and approach to vocational education may vary among these countries, reflecting their diverse needs and priorities. For example, some countries like Bulgaria may place more emphasis on theoretical learning, while others like Estonia may place more emphasis on practical learning through hands-on experience and apprenticeships. The different types of vocational schools and programs offered also reflect these priorities, ranging from traditional vocational schools to more specialized programs that provide in-depth training in specific industries or fields.

Despite these differences, vocational education remains a vital component of the educational systems in these countries. By providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen careers, vocational education helps to build a strong and competitive workforce that can drive economic growth and prosperity. The focus on hands-on training, apprenticeships, and real-world experience prepares students for the challenges they will face in the workforce, giving them the practical skills, they need to succeed in the job market.

Despite variations between the countries, the overarching goal of vocational education in these countries is to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen careers. This includes a focus on hands-on training, apprenticeships, and real-world experience that can help prepare students for the challenges they will face in the workforce. Additionally, many vocational schools and

programs in these countries offer flexible schedules and opportunities for customization, so that students can choose the path that best fits their goals and needs.

In the current job market, having a strong vocational education can be a major advantage. With the right skills and training, individuals are more likely to secure high-paying and in-demand jobs and are more likely to succeed in their careers over time. As a result, it's no surprise that vocational education continues to be a priority for many governments, educators, and students around the world.

13.4. High Education General Analysis

- Bulgaria: Higher education in Bulgaria is provided by universities and colleges. The Bulgarian government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The country has a strong tradition of science and technology education, and the higher education system is well-regarded. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to improve the quality of education and increase access to higher education for all students.

- Italy: Higher education in Italy is provided by universities, polytechnics, and higher education institutions. Italy has a long tradition of higher education, and its universities are well-regarded both nationally and internationally. The Italian government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to improve these issues.

- Spain: Higher education in Spain is provided by universities and colleges. The Spanish government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The Spanish higher education system is well-regarded and has a strong tradition of science and technology education. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to improve these issues.

- Estonia: Higher education in Estonia is provided by universities and colleges. The Estonian government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The higher education system in Estonia is well-regarded, and the country has a strong tradition of science and technology education. Estonia has also been at the forefront of using technology to enhance and improve its higher education system.

- Netherlands: Higher education in the Netherlands is provided by universities and colleges. The Dutch government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The higher education system in the Netherlands is well-regarded, and the country has a strong tradition of science and technology education. The Netherlands is also known for its innovative and progressive approach to higher education, and there have been efforts to use technology to enhance and improve the higher education system.

- Hungary: Higher education in Hungary is provided by universities and colleges. The Hungarian government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The higher education system in Hungary is well-regarded, and the country has a strong tradition of science and technology education. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to improve these issues.

- Cyprus: Higher education in Cyprus is provided by universities and colleges. The Cypriot government provides funding for higher education, and there are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. The higher education system in Cyprus is well-regarded, and the country has a strong

tradition of science and technology education. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to improve these issues.

Overall, all of these countries have well-regarded higher education systems with a strong tradition of science and technology education. However, there have been concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in some of these countries in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform their higher education systems to address these issues.

Higher education in these countries is provided by universities, colleges, polytechnics, and higher education institutions, and the government of each country provides funding for higher education. There are also private institutions that offer higher education programs. All of these countries have faced concerns about the quality of education and access to higher education in recent years, and there have been efforts to reform the higher education system to address these issues.

The higher education system in Estonia is known for its use of technology to enhance and improve its system, while the Netherlands is known for its innovative and progressive approach to higher education.

14. SWOT General Analysis

SWOT
EDIPLOMA

strengths
Digital infrastructure investment; Accessible education institutions, vocational teacher training; Employer involvement; and Increased digital competencies.

weaknesses
Lack of digital infrastructure in poor and remote areas; Shortage of people with ICT skills; Lack of digital competencies among educators and specialists

opportunities
Opportunities in developing digital infrastructure, Expanding the reach of education, and Enhancing its quality through innovative technologies like AI and machine learning.

threats
Insufficient digital infrastructure; Resistance to change among educators and students; Data privacy and security concerns Intellectual property rights issues; Funding limitations
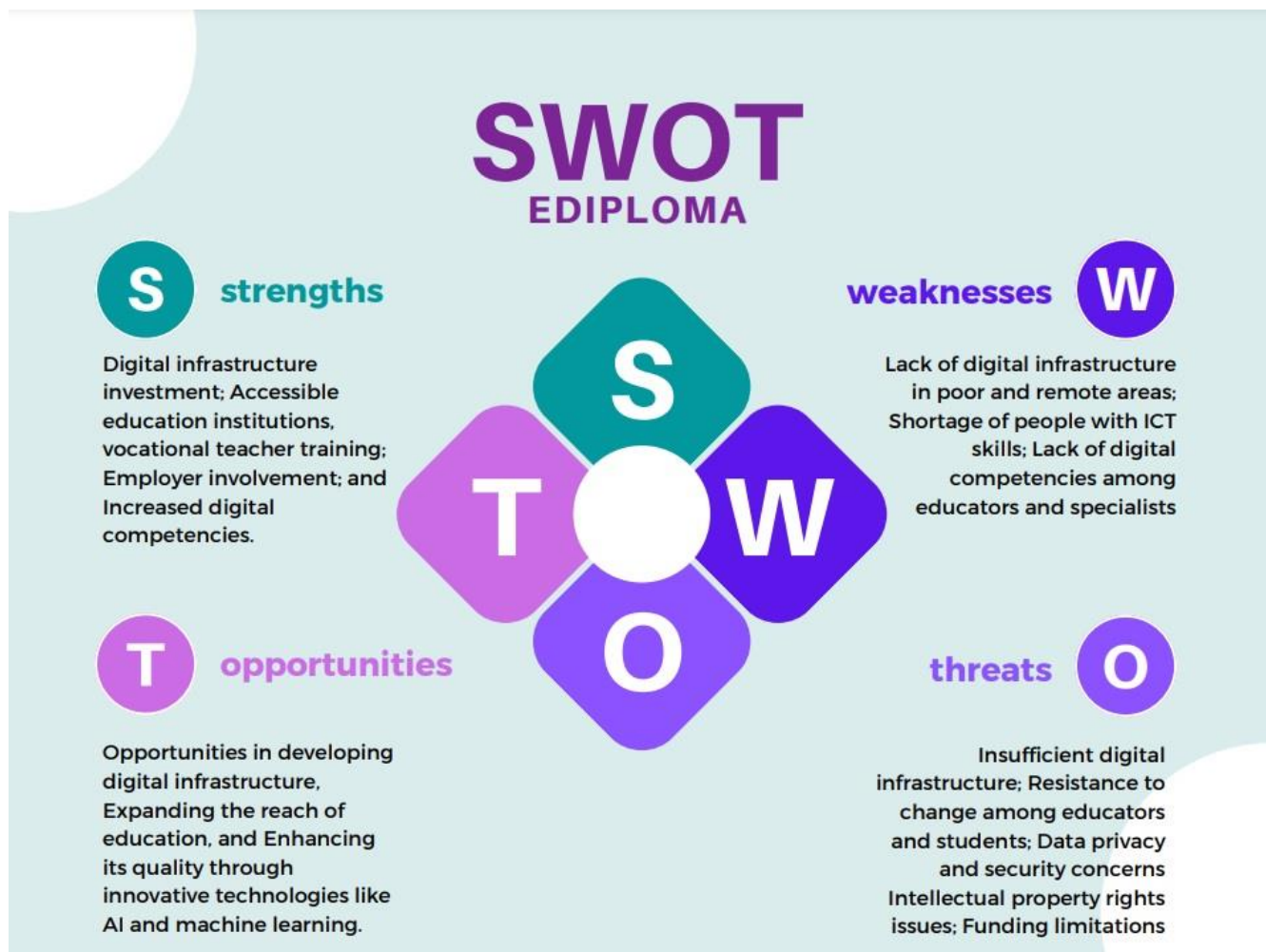
Figure 9. SWOT analysis graphics

14.1. Common Strengths

One of the most significant strengths of digital education in these countries is the level of investment that is being made in the development of their digital infrastructure. This is particularly true for the Netherlands and Estonia, where the government has made substantial investments in the development of digital solutions, which have contributed to the increase in the level of digital competence among the population. The same is true for Italy, where the State and the Regions have initiated several programs that have given further impetus to digital education.

Investing in digital infrastructure has many benefits for these countries, including increased access to education, increased efficiency and diversity in education, and improved digital competencies among the population. This is a positive trend that could help these countries take advantage of new digital trends and opportunities. The Netherlands, Estonia, and Italy have all made significant progress in this area and have become leaders in the field of digital education. By investing in digital infrastructure, these countries are positioning themselves to be at the forefront of the digital education revolution and to reap the benefits of the digital economy.

Another strength of digital education in Europe is the level of digital infrastructure in general education schools and vocational training institutions. This is especially true for Hungary, where the digital infrastructure of these institutions is at a good level, and for Spain, where the digital infrastructure is highly developed and accessible.

In Hungary and Spain, the digital infrastructure in general education schools and vocational training institutions is highly developed and accessible, which is a major strength in their digital education sector. This provides students with the necessary resources and technology to participate in digital learning, which is becoming increasingly important in today's digital world. The investment in digital infrastructure ensures that students are exposed to modern technologies and that they have the opportunity to develop their digital competencies, which are becoming increasingly important in many areas of life and work. The level of digital infrastructure in educational institutions is a key factor in promoting the growth and development of digital education and provides a solid foundation for its future growth.

The digitalization of the education system in these countries has also made education more accessible, diverse, and efficient. In Bulgaria, for instance, digital solutions offered on a state level have greatly impacted the development of people's digital competencies. The same is true for Cyprus, where digital education has been seen as a tool for promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Moreover, there has been an increasing focus on developing special digital competencies of vocational teachers in several of these countries. In Hungary, for example, the government has launched programs to strengthen the special digital competencies of vocational teachers, while in Italy, training programs for vocational education teachers have been put in place to observe ICT-rich work at workplaces, labs of start-ups, and research institutions.

Finally, several of these countries have also recognized the importance of involving employers in providing ICT-rich learning opportunities for vocational students. In Spain, for example, employers have been increasingly involved in providing ICT-rich learning venues for vocational students, while in Italy, the role of employers has been increasing in providing ICT-rich learning venues for vocational students through funding from industry partners. The involvement of employers in digital education is seen as a positive aspect. This is because employers can provide students with valuable hands-on experience and real-world training that is aligned with industry needs and requirements. This has helped to ensure that vocational students receive the best possible education and are well-prepared for the job market.

14.2. Common Weaknesses

In the field of digital education, every country has its own strengths and weaknesses. While some countries have advanced digital infrastructure and well-trained teachers, others struggle with outdated

technology and a shortage of skilled personnel. Here the focus is on the weaknesses that are present in various countries in terms of their digital education systems.

By identifying these weaknesses, it is possible to highlight the areas that require improvement and suggest potential solutions to address them. This will help to create more effective and inclusive digital education systems, which will benefit both students and educators.

The most prominent of these are:

- Lack of digital infrastructure in poor and remote areas

One of the biggest challenges facing digital education in these countries is the lack of digital infrastructure in poor and remote areas. This makes it difficult for students in these areas to access digital education resources, which is a major barrier to their educational development.

In these countries, many rural and economically disadvantaged areas have limited access to modern technology and the internet. This lack of digital infrastructure means that students in these areas are unable to fully participate in digital education programs and are at a disadvantage compared to their peers in more affluent areas.

Without proper access to digital education resources, students in poor and remote areas may miss out on important learning opportunities and fall behind in their studies. This can have long-term consequences for their future academic and professional success. It is crucial that these countries take steps to address the digital divide and ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, have equal access to digital education resources. This will require significant investment in digital infrastructure and programs to support students and teachers in these areas.

- Shortage of people with ICT skills

Another major weakness in digital education is the shortage of people with ICT skills. This is a major challenge for universities and vocational education and training (VET) institutions, which lack digital learning strategies and internal competencies.

The shortage of people with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills is a significant issue that affects the effectiveness of digital education in these countries. The lack of individuals with ICT skills means that universities and VET institutions often do not have the necessary knowledge and expertise to develop and implement effective digital learning strategies. This results in a lack of internal competencies, making it difficult to provide students with access to the latest technology and digital resources. This shortage of ICT skills also creates a gap in the workforce, which can have negative effects on the economy and hinder technological advancement. To overcome this weakness, it is essential to invest in programs and initiatives that help to build the ICT skills of educators and professionals in the field of digital education.

- Lack of digital competencies among educators and specialists

The third major weakness in digital education is the lack of digital competencies among educators and specialists. This is a major challenge for the digitization of learning content using novel technologies, such as simulations, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR).

The lack of digital competencies among educators and specialists in the field of digital education is a major concern that needs to be addressed. Digital technologies, such as simulations, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR), have the potential to revolutionize the way students learn and interact with educational content. However, for this to be possible, there must be a sufficient number of educators and specialists who are trained in these technologies and have the competencies to use them effectively in the classroom.

Currently, there is a shortage of people with these skills, which is hindering the adoption of digital technologies in education. This results in a gap between the potential of these technologies and their

actual use, which means that students are missing out on the benefits of digital education. This is a major weakness that needs to be addressed to ensure that all students have access to the best possible education.

To address this weakness, it is necessary to invest in the development of digital competencies among educators and specialists. This could include providing training programs, professional development opportunities, and support for the adoption of digital technologies in the classroom. Additionally, it may be necessary to increase the number of people entering the field of education technology and to provide incentives for educators and specialists to pursue careers in this field.

The shortage of digital competencies among educators and specialists is a major weakness in the field of digital education. Addressing this weakness will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and the private sector. This will ensure that students have access to the best possible digital education and will help to position these countries at the forefront of the digital education revolution.

14.3. Common Opportunities

Digital education is rapidly changing the face of education in Europe and around the world, and with it, comes a range of new opportunities for both students and educators. Here is a closer look at the opportunities that are emerging in digital education across participant countries.

- Opportunities in the Development of Digital Infrastructure:

One of the most significant opportunities in digital education in these countries is the continued development of digital infrastructure. This includes investments in broadband connectivity, digital equipment, and educational software. With the continued growth of digital technologies and the rise of the digital economy, there is a growing demand for a highly skilled digital workforce, which will in turn drive investment in the development of digital education infrastructure.

The development of digital infrastructure presents a significant opportunity for these countries to improve digital education and prepare their workforce for the digital economy. By investing in broadband connectivity, digital equipment, and educational software, these countries can create the necessary foundation for delivering high-quality digital education to their students. Additionally, the continued growth of digital technologies and the rising demand for a skilled digital workforce provides further incentive for these countries to prioritize the development of digital education infrastructure. With the right investments, these countries can create an environment where students and educators have access to the tools and resources they need to succeed in the digital age.

- Expanding the Reach of Digital Education:

Another opportunity in digital education is the potential to expand its reach beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom. This can be achieved using technology-enhanced learning, such as online courses, distance learning, and mobile learning. By making education more accessible and flexible, students can receive an education that fits their lifestyle, which in turn, can lead to improved learning outcomes.

Expanding the reach of digital education is a major opportunity for countries looking to improve their education systems. With technology-enhanced learning, education can become more flexible and accessible, allowing students to learn in ways that suit their lifestyles and needs. For example, online courses, distance learning, and mobile learning can provide students with the opportunity to receive an education no matter where they are located. This can be particularly beneficial for students in rural or remote areas, who may have limited access to traditional educational resources. By expanding the reach of digital education, countries can provide students with greater educational opportunities, which can help to improve learning outcomes and increase the number of highly skilled digital workers needed to support the growth of the digital economy.

▪ Enhancing the Quality of Digital Education:

A third opportunity in digital education is the potential to enhance its quality. This can be achieved using new and innovative digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics. These technologies can help to personalize learning experiences and provide real-time feedback to both students and educators. This can lead to improved student engagement and motivation, as well as better educational outcomes.

In addition to expanding the reach of digital education and making it more accessible to students, another opportunity in this field is the potential to enhance its quality. With the integration of innovative digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics, the quality of digital education can be significantly improved. These technologies have the potential to personalize the learning experience for each student and provide real-time feedback to both students and educators.

For example, the use of artificial intelligence in digital education can provide students with personalized learning paths based on their individual learning styles and pace. Additionally, machine learning algorithms can be used to identify areas where students are struggling and provide them with personalized support and guidance to help them overcome their difficulties. With the help of big data analytics, educators can also gain valuable insights into how students are interacting with digital education resources and use this information to adjust and improvements to their teaching strategies.

The integration of cutting-edge digital technologies in digital education presents a significant opportunity to enhance its quality and improve educational outcomes for students. By leveraging these tools, educators can create more engaging and personalized learning experiences, which can lead to improved student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. In the analysed countries, the use of technology in education is seen as a key enabler for improving the quality of education and preparing students for the digital world. Digital technologies allow for the creation of interactive and immersive learning experiences that can make education more engaging, accessible, and effective.

Additionally, the use of technology in education can also help teachers to assess student progress and provide individualized feedback, leading to improved student outcomes. By investing in the development and implementation of cutting-edge digital technologies in education, these countries aim to give students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the digital age and compete in the global economy.

Digital education is presenting a range of new opportunities for the future of education in Europe. From the continued development of digital infrastructure to the expansion of the reach of digital education and the enhancement of its quality, there is no doubt that digital education is set to play an increasingly important role in the future of education. The challenge for educators and policymakers is to capitalize on these opportunities and to work together to create a more equitable, effective, and accessible digital education system for all students.

14.4. Common Threats

In terms of the threats to digital education in the analysed countries, there are some common challenges that can be found across all seven countries. Some of the key challenges include:

▪ Insufficient digital infrastructure: In some countries, there may be an inadequate investment in digital infrastructure, which can limit access to online education and hinder its quality. This can result in a digital divide between students who have access to technology and those who do not, leading to unequal educational opportunities.

Insufficient digital infrastructure in some countries can be a significant challenge to the implementation and growth of online education. A lack of investment in digital infrastructure can limit access to online education and negatively impact its quality, resulting in a digital divide between students who have access

to technology and those who do not. This can lead to unequal educational opportunities, where some students are able to receive a high-quality education while others are left behind. To address this challenge, governments, schools, and universities must collaborate to ensure that adequate investments are made in digital infrastructure and that all students have access to the technology and resources they need to participate in online education effectively. This can involve initiatives such as providing students with laptops, tablets, or other devices, and building or upgrading the network infrastructure to ensure that online learning is accessible and reliable.

- **Resistance to change:** There may be resistance to change among educators and students who are used to traditional teaching methods, which can slow down the adoption of digital education.

Resistance to change is a common challenge that can hinder the growth of digital education in many countries. This resistance may come from educators who are used to traditional teaching methods, or from students who are comfortable with the traditional way of learning. This reluctance to embrace change can slow down the adoption of digital education, leading to a slower pace of progress and development in this field. This can also pose a significant challenge to policymakers who are trying to promote the adoption of digital education in their countries, as they must overcome the resistance of educators and students to successfully integrate digital education into their curricula.

- **Data privacy and security concerns:** In the era of digital education, there are potential risks to students' personal data and privacy, which can result in a loss of confidence in the system and hinder its adoption.

In the realm of digital education, data privacy, and security are of utmost importance. With the increasing reliance on technology in education, there are potential risks to students' personal data and privacy. This can lead to a loss of confidence in the system and pose a significant challenge to its adoption. With sensitive information being stored and transmitted digitally, it is crucial that appropriate measures are put in place to ensure that this data is protected against unauthorized access or misuse.

This requires the implementation of robust data security measures, such as encryption, firewalls, and user authentication protocols, as well as strict adherence to privacy regulations. With these measures in place, it is possible to mitigate the risks associated with data privacy and security and build trust in the digital education system, enabling it to reach its full potential.

- **Intellectual property rights:** There are also challenges related to copyright and intellectual property rights, which can limit the distribution of educational materials online.

One of the challenges in the realm of digital education is the issue of intellectual property rights. The use of educational materials in an online setting raises questions about the proper distribution of such materials and the protection of copyright laws. Proper distribution of online educational materials and protection of copyright laws is specifically important for online education because the digital nature of online materials makes it easier for them to be shared, copied, and distributed without permission. This can result in copyright infringement, which can have legal and financial consequences for both the creators of the materials and the users. The infringement of intellectual property rights can hinder the distribution of educational materials online, potentially limiting the scope and reach of digital education. Thus, finding a balance between promoting access to educational resources and protecting the rights of content creators remains a challenge for the development of digital education.

- **Teacher training and development:** Ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices is another challenge for countries in promoting digital education.

The lack of proper training and development for teachers can be a challenge for countries in promoting digital education. Teachers need to have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices. Without proper training and development, teachers may be

resistant to change, which can slow down the adoption of digital education and hinder its quality. To ensure the success of digital education initiatives, it is essential that teachers must receive the help they need to integrate technology into their teaching methods in an effective and meaningful way. This includes providing opportunities for professional development and continuous learning, as well as resources and tools to help them stay up to date with the latest technologies and best practices in digital education.

- Funding and resources: Another challenge is ensuring that adequate funding and resources are available to support the development and implementation of digital education initiatives.

One of the challenges in promoting digital education is ensuring that sufficient funding and resources are available to support the development and implementation of initiatives. This can include investments in technology, teacher training and professional development, and other resources necessary for delivering high-quality online learning experiences. Without adequate funding and support, it can be difficult for countries to fully realize the potential benefits of digital education, such as improved student outcomes and increased access to educational opportunities. This challenge is significant, as it requires a sustained investment over time and a commitment to developing the infrastructure and resources needed to make digital education a success.

While these challenges are common across all seven countries, the specific challenges that each country faces may differ based on its unique context and priorities. Additionally, some countries may have more advanced strategies in place to address these challenges, while others may still be in the early stages of implementation. The challenges faced by each country in its journey toward incorporating digital education into its education system are diverse and context specific. These challenges may stem from a variety of factors such as inadequate digital infrastructure, resistance to change, data privacy and security concerns, intellectual property rights, teacher training and development, and funding and resources. Despite these challenges, each country has its unique approach to overcoming them, considering its priorities, context, and level of development. Some countries may have already implemented advanced strategies to address these challenges, while others may still be in the early stages of implementation. Regardless, it is clear that all countries aim to ensure that their citizens have access to high-quality digital education opportunities, which will equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the digital age.

15. Interim conclusions

In conclusion, the shift towards digital education and vocational education and training (VET) in Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Estonia, Cyprus, and the Netherlands is a testament to its growing importance in today's fast-paced and highly technological world. The national educational systems in these countries recognize the crucial role digital education plays in equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the digital age and have therefore been actively incorporating it into their curricula.

However, the journey toward a successful digital education system is not without challenges. These countries face several obstacles, including inadequate digital infrastructure, which can limit access to quality online education and exacerbate the digital divide between students who have access to technology and those who do not. There is also resistance to change among educators and students who are used to traditional teaching methods, which can slow down the adoption of digital education.

Moreover, the growing use of technology in education also raises concerns about data privacy and security, which can result in a loss of confidence in the system and hinder its adoption. Additionally, there are challenges related to copyright and intellectual property rights, which can limit the distribution of educational materials online. Ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices is another important consideration. Lastly, adequate funding and resources must be available to support the development and implementation of digital education initiatives.

To address these challenges and ensure the success of digital education in these countries, a comprehensive approach is needed. Policymakers and stakeholders must consider both the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems and make necessary improvements. This could include investing in digital infrastructure, providing teacher training and development opportunities, and allocating adequate funding and resources to support digital education initiatives. By doing so, these countries can build a strong and competitive digital workforce, prepared to meet the demands of the 21st century and equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing job market.

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